

# **HISTORICAL REVIEW OF THE USE OF MOTORIZED VEHICLES ON LANDS ADMINISTERED BY IZEMBEEK REFUGE**

**Brian Glaspell and Helen Clough  
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service**

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## **Introduction**

The purpose of this report is to review and describe the historical use of motorized vehicles within lands administered by the Izembek National Wildlife Refuge, with emphasis on the period prior to passage of the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA) on December 2, 1980. A proposed King Cove to Northeast Cold Bay (NeCB) hovercraft-terminal access road, and the upcoming revision of the Izembek Comprehensive Conservation Plan prompted preparation of this document.

Based on a thorough review of secondary sources (published reports, refuge annual narratives, and other refuge files), it is clear that motorized vehicles have been used on established roads within the refuge since before the refuge was created in 1960. It is also clear, however, that motorized vehicle use has generally been confined to existing roads, with only irregular, isolated occurrences of off-road use.

## **Methodology**

Although this report was initially intended to focus narrowly on lands adjacent to the proposed King Cove access road, we collected information relevant to all the lands administered by Izembek Refuge including Unimak Island (part of Alaska Maritime Refuge) and the Pavlof Unit of Alaska Peninsula Refuge. Our inquiry focused on the three communities most likely to access these lands: Cold Bay, King Cove, and False Pass.

We began our investigation by reviewing the annual narratives that Izembek Refuge staff prepared each year from 1961 through the mid 1990s. We also reviewed the 1985 Izembek National Wildlife Refuge Comprehensive Conservation Plan and identified relevant references from the bibliography. These resources, combined with miscellaneous files and correspondence provided by current Izembek staff, comprised the "data" that we analyzed for this report.

## **Background**

Izembek National Wildlife Refuge was established as Izembek National Wildlife Range by Public Land Order No. # 2216 on December 6, 1960 as a breeding ground and management area for all forms of wildlife. With passage of ANILCA in 1980, the area was re-named Izembek National Wildlife Refuge and 300,000 acres of the refuge were designated Wilderness.

ANILCA requires that Izembek Refuge prepare and, from time to time, revise a comprehensive conservation plan (CCP) and that the Refuge be managed to maintain the opportunity for

subsistence uses by local residents. The 1985 CCP describes, in general terms, the traditional use of motorized vehicles by local residents. However, it is now acknowledged that the 1985 description is inadequate as a basis for protecting or otherwise managing those uses. In the following section, a more detailed description of the historical use of motorized vehicles by Izembek area communities is provided.

### Cold Bay

<sup>1</sup>Cold Bay is a community of 116 (2002 DCED certified population) located within the boundary of Izembek Refuge. It has a 10,420= paved and lighted runway, and a deep-water dock/pier. There are several state and federal government offices located in the community, including the Izembek Refuge headquarters. Cold Bay has long served as a regional air transportation hub, and the majority of local employment is provided by related support services and by state and federal government. Residents employed in these sectors tend to be transient, and the proportion of the population that is Alaska Native or part Native (17%) is significantly smaller than in other nearby communities (48% Native or part Native in King Cove, 66% in False Pass).

Archaeological sites indicate that the Cold Bay area was once inhabited by a large Native population, and it was later used by European hunters and trappers. However, the modern history of Cold Bay begins with the establishment of Fort Randall Air Base in 1941. During that time, the road system in and around what is now Izembek Refuge was developed by the military.

There is limited information available about recreational and subsistence activities in Cold Bay during the period from the end of World War II to the establishment of Izembek Range in 1960. The military maintained a continuous presence during that period (and into the 1970s) and civilian Fish and Wildlife workers first established a presence in the area in 1948 (Pettersen et al. 1983). Cold Bay residents and visitors likely made extensive use of the local road system for access to hunting, fishing, and other activities. In addition, records indicate that some motorized off-road travel also occurred during this period. In particular, the Izembek Range narrative for September-December 1961 refers to an Air Force "duck camp" whose members, in previous years, used "four or six-wheeled, tired vehicles" on old World War II trails, and "'weasel" across the heath and marshes" (p.4).

After 1960, annual narratives prepared by Izembek staff provide detailed accounts of recreational and subsistence activities in and around Cold Bay. Additional descriptions of public access and use are provided in supplementary refuge documents and in ethnographic reports prepared by Evergreen State College (1977), the USDI Minerals Management Service (Pettersen et al. 1983), and the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (Fall et al. 1990).

In 1961, soon after the December 1960 establishment of the Izembek Range (renamed the Izembek Refuge by ANILCA in 1980), Refuge staff began informing the military and other members of the public that motorized off-road travel was prohibited according to the provisions

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<sup>1</sup> Background information on the history and demographics of Cold Bay, King Cove, and False Pass is from the Department of Community and Economic Development Alaska Community Database, accessed on the World Wide Web November 10, 2003. [http://www.dced.state.ak.us/cbd/commdb/cf\\_cis.cfm](http://www.dced.state.ak.us/cbd/commdb/cf_cis.cfm)

of 50 CFR 26.14 (Refuge Annual Narrative September-December 1961). That regulation stated:

"Travel in or use of vehicles is prohibited in wildlife refuge areas except on public highways and on roads, camp grounds, and parking areas designated and posted for travel and public use by the officer in charge."

In 1963, Refuge records refer generally to some violation of posted limits to vehicular travel, and more specifically to an incident in which Coast Guard and Air Force personnel at Cape Sarichef bladed an unauthorized road along the north side of Unimak Island. Aside from these incidents, there is little mention of off-road vehicle use in Refuge narratives or in other documents until the 1970s. It is likely that off-road vehicle use during this period would have been limited because, 1) Refuge staff were actively working to restrict vehicles to existing roads, 2) existing roads provided excellent access for most uses, and 3) reliable, off-road vehicles (other than snowmachines) were not widely available to individuals until after 1970 (Sinnott 1990).

While it is not entirely clear from published sources when three-wheeled all-terrain vehicles ("three-wheelers") first arrived in Cold Bay, it must have been between 1970, when they became available nationally (Sinnott 1990) and 1977, when researchers from Evergreen College observed the use of "three-wheeled Hondas" in communities throughout the Alaska Peninsula (Evergreen College 1977). Also in 1977, refuge-specific regulations (50 CFR 26.34) which explicitly restricted the use of motorized vehicles to the established road system in Izembek were published in the Federal Register.

By 1979, the use of three-wheelers in and around Cold Bay had become an issue of concern for Refuge staff. In that year's annual narrative, manager John Sarvis noted "a large upsurge in 3-wheeler and motorcycle use on Bering Sea beaches" and worried that riders would eventually be tempted onto Refuge lands. By 1980, three-wheelers had become ubiquitous in Cold Bay, and the refuge manager was prompted to hold a town meeting to address their use. A description of the meeting is provided in the Izembek annual narrative for that year:

"Three wheelers, or 3-wheeled all-terrain vehicles, became very popular early in the year, with nearly every family having at least one and many families having several. The lure of driving to places that previously could only be reached by walking was more than most could stand. On May 29, Sarvis [Refuge Manager] held a public meeting to discuss the problem with the community. After 4 hours of heated discussion and a vote by the participants, a system of designated roads was established, with the clear understanding that no others were to be used. The meeting was considered a success by the staff and the locals seemed pleased to have taken part in the decision-making process. Road mileages and maps showing the designated roads were posted on the refuge bulletin boards" (p.52).

It is not clear whether or not the posted 1980 maps have survived to the present. The Refuge has copies of maps that may have been produced as a result of the town meeting, but unfortunately, they are not dated. However, it is likely that the road system designated at that time is identical to the current system (see attached map) because the Refuge CCP, initiated in 1983 and finalized

in 1985, adopted a No-action alternative that allows for maintenance of existing roads but prohibits building new roads.

From 1960 through 1980 Izembek Refuge maintained a consistent policy of restricting motorized vehicle use to the Cold Bay road system, and the general pattern of public use developed accordingly. It appears that there was little, if any, change after ANILCA was passed in 1980. The refuge-specific vehicle restrictions first published in 1977 were reaffirmed in temporary regulations published in May 1980 and valid through May 1982 (Federal Register 1980). The 1985 Refuge CCP maintained long-standing management direction by specifying that recreational and subsistence use of "trucks, passenger vehicles and ORVs will be limited to designated roads and trails open to general public use" (pp. 111-114). Restricting vehicles to existing roads was not particularly controversial at that time. In a position paper published as part of the final CCP, the State of Alaska expressed support for aircraft landing and jet-boat prohibitions and recommended that four specific roads within the Refuge "be recognized as traditional access" (p. 18).

Through the 1980s and into the present, the road system has continued to be the principal means of Refuge access for Cold Bay residents. Household surveys and interviews conducted by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game between 1985 and 1987 confirmed that "road vehicles" were the most common form of transportation used for hunting by Cold Bay residents. Refuge annual narratives during the 1980s likewise confirm that attempts at off-road access were infrequent, often ill-fated (see narratives from 1984, p.131; and 1986, p.151) and always regarded as violations. An excerpt from the 1992 Refuge annual narrative nicely summarizes the history of vehicle use on the Refuge:

"All terrain vehicles (ATVs) are a common mode of transportation in Cold Bay and other area villages, so the potential for off-roading problems is high. Actual problems are typically isolated instances of people driving off-road to retrieve a caribou or people off-roading in an ATV for a short distance to gain access to the beach. . . . The current road system was so designated at a public meeting in the 1970's [actually in 1980]. The drivable portions of the roads remaining from military occupations during the 1940's and 1950's remained open and were designated the Cold Bay road system. At that time Cold Bay vehicular traffic was mainly passenger four-wheel drive vehicles, as ATV's were unheard of in those days. If a portion of a road had become impassable to a 4x4 passenger vehicle, it was closed at that point. With the surge in ATV popularity, a few challenges to the decision have occasionally cropped up. As the road system stands now, access is excellent for all refuge public use activities. Opposition to points where a road has been closed is occasionally voiced by a few individuals wanting to drive somewhere else to hunt or trap, but the system has remained unaltered" (p.79).

King Cove

<sup>2</sup>King Cove is a community of 794 (2002 DCED certified population) located 18 miles southeast of Cold Bay. It was founded in 1911 as the site of a salmon cannery and remains closely tied to fishing and fish processing. At present, a cannery operated by Peter Pan Seafoods is one of the largest in the state of Alaska, bringing in up to 500 non-resident workers as needed. King Cove has a boat harbor, several docks, and a 3,360' gravel runway, but air travel is frequently hampered by strong winds. At present, there is no road access to other communities or into Izembek Refuge from King Cove.

Compared to Cold Bay, there is relatively little information available concerning recreation and subsistence access and activities originating from King Cove. Izembek Refuge annual narratives generally do not discuss King Cove, so ethnographic reports prepared by the Department of Fish and Game and various contractors constitute the primary information sources that we used for this section. The reports referenced here describe studies conducted from the late 1970s through the early 1990s. However, only very general data are available for the pre-ANILCA period.

A substantial proportion of the King Cove subsistence harvest effort has traditionally been focused on marine resources, but residents also hunt caribou and waterfowl (Langdon 1982, Braund et al. 1986, Fall et al. 1993). Langdon (1982) estimated that caribou was probably the major subsistence item for King Cove residents, in terms of total pounds, during the late 1970s and early 1980s. (However, in 1993, Fall et al. reported that land mammals, including caribou, represented only about 15% of the total subsistence harvest that year; the authors speculated that the reduction was due to a substantial decline in the southern Alaska Peninsula caribou herd). According to Langdon, Caribou were hunted "north of King Cove and on the east side of Cold Bay, on the flat lands at the head of Pavlof Bay, and from boats in the winter time when they come down to the beaches to get salt" (p. 173). Langdon also reported that King Cove residents hunted ducks and geese in Kinzaroff Lagoon and Morzhovoi Bay.

Langdon (1982) does not describe how King Cove residents accessed caribou or other land mammals except in the reference to hunting from boats. However, in questionnaires sent out to King Cove Households in 1985-86 and 1986-87, researchers from the Alaska Department of Fish and Game found that commercial fishing boats were by far the most common method of transportation used for caribou hunting (Fall et al. 1990). One King Cove respondent to the 1986-87 questionnaire reported the use of an off-road vehicle (ORV) for caribou hunting, although it is not clear where or how the ORV was used.

Based on the documents reviewed here, there is little evidence to suggest that King Cove residents traditionally employed off-road vehicles to access hunting opportunities on lands administered by Izembek Refuge, although isolated instances of such use almost certainly have occurred.

False Pass

<sup>3</sup>False Pass is a community of 79 (2002 DCED certified population) located on the eastern shore

<sup>2</sup> Information in this paragraph is from the Alaska Community Database B see footnote #1.

<sup>3</sup> Information in this paragraph is from the Alaska Community Database B see footnote #1.

of Unimak Island (most of which is administered by Izembek Refuge). The community was originally settled in the early 1900s and grew substantially after a cannery was built in 1917. The cannery operated nearly continuously until 1981 when it was destroyed by a fire and never rebuilt. Most employment is in fishing and fishing support services. False Pass has a 2100' gravel airstrip, a seaplane base, and a dock.

Like King Cove and in contrast to Cold Bay, there is fairly limited information available about activities and access methods originating in False Pass. Primary information sources include some of the same ethnographic reports reviewed previously. It is clear from early Refuge annual narratives (e.g. September-December 1963) that military personnel occasionally used off-road vehicles near Cape Sarichef, at the opposite end of Unimak Island from False Pass. In a 1982 memo from the Fish and Wildlife Service regional office to the Izembek Refuge manager, there is also a reference to the use of three-wheelers "on the tundra" of Unimak Island (USFWS 1982). Like other off-road activities near Cold Bay, these uses appear to have been isolated events and were regarded by Refuge staff at the time as violations.

Subsistence studies conducted by Langdon (1982) and Fall and associates (Fall et al. 1990, Fall et al. 1996) show that salmon and caribou were the two most important subsistence resources (as a percentage of total harvest pounds) for False Pass residents in the late 1970s and mid 1980s. There is no detailed information available about the methods of transportation used for hunting caribou, although Fall et al. (1990) report that residents in 1985-1987 generally used commercial fishing boats, skiffs and off-road vehicles. It should be noted that these authors' results were based on just two responses to surveys administered in 1985-86, and an additional two responses in 1986-87.

Based on the information reviewed for this report, it is difficult to conclude whether or not False Pass residents have traditionally employed off-road vehicles to access subsistence opportunities on lands administered by Izembek Refuge. However, it is known that off-road vehicles have long been present in the community (Fall et al. 1996 found that 70% of False Pass households owned them in 1987-88), and sporadic (at least) use of such vehicles has occurred on Unimak Island uplands (USFWS 1982).

## **Conclusion**

The use of motorized vehicles on roads and trails near Cold Bay pre-dates establishment of Izembek Refuge by nearly 20 years. The exact date of the arrival of off-road, or all-terrain vehicles in the area is subject to debate, but it appears to have been several years or more before the passage of ANILCA. Clearly, ORVs were traditionally employed for subsistence and other activities before 1980. It is important to note, however, that regular use of motorized vehicles has been confined to existing roads since 1960. From 1960 through 1980, regulations made it unlawful to travel off-road with a motorized vehicle on Izembek Refuge, and Refuge records indicate that off-road uses (when they occurred) were indeed treated as violations. Therefore, it is unlikely that traditional off-road use of motorized vehicles ever developed.

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#### **Other Documents Reviewed and Not Cited**

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9/21/1997. Regional Director questions and answers provided by Paul Schmidt. Questions had to do with Izembek Refuge proposed regulation package.

3/9/1991. Letter from ABob J@ [likely Bob Jones] to Chris [Chris Dau] about vehicle use.

3/4/91. Handwritten letter from Chris Dau to Bob [likely Bob Jones] about vehicle use.

3/4/1991. Notes of phone conversation with Ed Bailey by Chris Dau about vehicles.

1991? USFWS. Briefing Statement Off-Road Vehicle Use on Refuges.

1990. USFWS. A review of secondary uses occurring on National Wildlife Refuges.

8/13/1987. Note to Regional director from Deputy Regional Director about Record of Decision - Implementation of Regulations of Izembek National Wildlife Refuge. Also included briefing information.

7/16/1987. Memo Regional Director to Director requesting publication of draft regulations in Federal Register.

4/9/1987. Finding of No Significant Impact. Proposed Regulations for Izembek National Wildlife Refuge EA.

1987. Environmental Assessment for regulation for the Izembek National Wildlife Refuge.

9/17/1986. Memo to Assistant Regional Director, Refuges and Wildlife from Refuge Supervisor south. Proposed Schedule for Implementation of Special Regulations for Izembek National Wildlife Refuge (NWR), Pavlof Unit of Alaska Peninsula (AP) NWR, and Unimak Island of Alaska Maritime (AM) NWR.

6/6/1985. Copy of Federal Register Notice of Availability for Izembek CCP from LEXUS NEXUS.

5/31/1985. Letter from Acting Regional Director David L. Olsen to Mr. F. Merle Buckwalter about boating.

Various dates 1985 and 1984. Transmittal letters for draft and final CCPs to various state and federal officials. Nothing specific to vehicle use. Some mention continued subsistence use.

8/19/1982. Memo to Izembek Refuge Manager from Operations Manager South [Regional Office] about annual inspection and attachment.

6/23/1982. Reply to Senator Stevens from Director.

5/20/1982. Letter to Assistant Secretary from Senator Stevens asking about an constituent inquiry about public access to World War II roads within the wildlife range in the Cold Bay area.

12/10/1981. Letter to Izembek Refuge Manager from Nancy E. Stromsen, Bristol Cooperative Management Plan enclosing draft summary of public meeting in Cold Bay on 11/18.

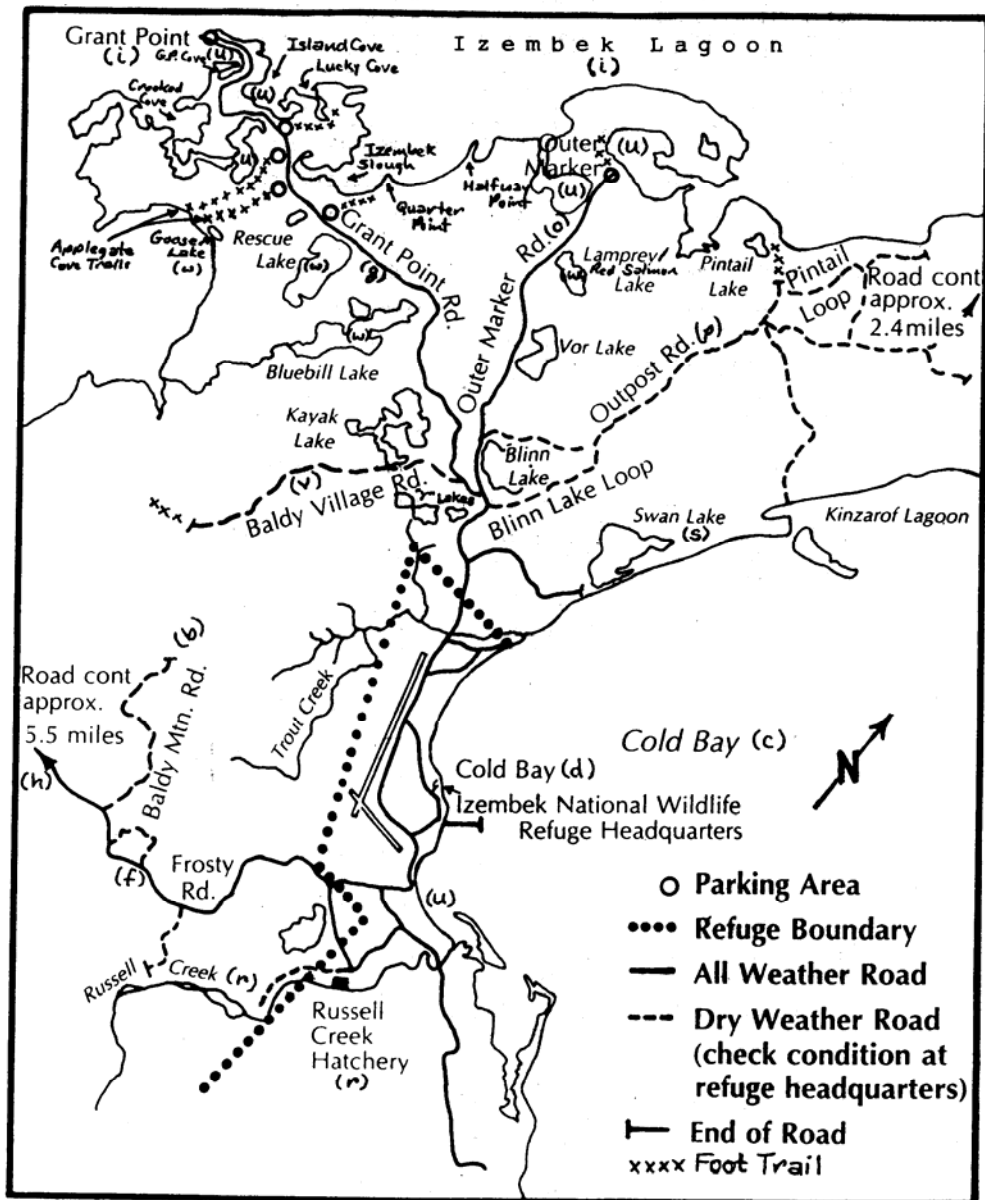
10/10/1979. Letter to Andy Nault, False Pass from Refuge Manager.

11/16/1977. Trapping special use permit issued to John Sarvis.

2/10/1977. Letter to trapper in Kansas.

### **Refuge Annual Narratives Reviewed**

1992, 1987, 1986, 1984, 1980, 1979, 1978, September-December 1963, May-August 1963, January-April 1963, September-December 1962, May-August 1962, January-April 1962, September-December



**COLD BAY ROAD SYSTEM**

**COLD BAY AREA ROAD SYSTEM**  
(about 42 miles of designated roads in Izembek NWR)

<b>1. SITE ROAD</b>		<b>MILES FROM U.S. POST OFFICE</b>
U.S. Post Office		0
Dump Road Turn - - - - -		1.4
Trout Creek Bridge - - - - -		2.1
"Y" (turn to Outer Marker Road) - - - - -		3.8
Baldy Village Road - - - - -		4.1
Cutoff to Outer Marker Road - - - - -		4.9
Izembek Refuge Boundary (sign) - - - - -		5.0
Turn to Gravel Pit - - - - -		6.1
Rescue Lake - - - - -		7.6
Quonset - - - - -		10.3
Grant Point boat launching turnoff - - - - -		11.0
Grant Point overlook (open to public except hunting) - - - - -		11.4
<b>2. BALDY VILLAGE ROAD</b>		<b>MILES FROM SITE ROAD</b>
Start of Baldy Village Rd. (4.1 miles from USPO)		0
End of Road - - - - -		3.6
<b>3. OUTER MARKER ROAD</b>		<b>MILES FROM "Y"</b>
"Y" (begin Outer Marker Rd., 3.8 miles from USPO)		0
RCA dish antenna - - - - -		0.5
Turn for Blinn Lake/Outpost Road - - - - -		0.6
Izembek Refuge Boundary (sign) - - - - -		0.8
FAA IFST Building - - - - -		1.0
Turn to VOR - - - - -		1.8
Lamprey Lake - - - - -		3.2
Outer Marker Building - - - - -		4.3
<b>4. OUTPOST ROAD</b>		<b>MILES FROM RCA BUILDING</b>
Blinn Lake/Outpost Rd. turnoff - RCA Bldgs. (4.4 miles from USPO)		0
Begin Outpost Road & Izembek Refuge Boundary (sign) - - - - -		1.1
Kinzarof Lagoon Road (2.7 miles to lagoon) - - - - -		4.2
Pintail Lake Loop Road - - - - -		4.2
Outpost #1 - - - - -		4.5
Return of Pintail Lake Loop Road - - - - -		5.3
One mile East Road (1 mile to end) - - - - -		6.2
Outpost #2 - - - - -		7.2
End of Outpost Road - - - - -		9.6
<b>5. PINTAIL LAKE LOOP ROAD</b>		<b>MILES FROM OUTPOST ROAD</b>
Begin Pintail Lake Loop Road (8.6 miles from USPO)		0
Pintail Lake parking - - - - -		0.5
Spur Road (.8 mile to end) - - - - -		1.6
Return to Outpost Road (between O.P. #1 & #2) - - - - -		2.7
<b>6. FROSTY ROAD</b>		<b>MILES FROM U.S. POST OFFICE</b>
United States Post Office		0
Stapp Creek - - - - -		1.1
Turn to Lower Russell Creek - - - - -		1.5
Begin Frosty Rd. (at fork to Hatchery) sign/Frosty Rd. - - - - -		2.1
Old Rifle Range - - - - -		3.8
Izembek Refuge Boundary (sign) - - - - -		4.8
Gravel Pit - - - - -		5.6
Baldy Mountain Road (2.1 mile to end) - - - - -		6.1
Frosty Creek Ridge Road (.7 mile to end) - - - - -		7.2
Frosty Creek - - - - -		7.7
Second Bridge - - - - -		9.4
Third Bridge - - - - -		11.2
Fourth Bridge - - - - -		12.6
End of Road at Fifth Creek - - - - -		13.9